




# The Mental Health Needs of Maltreated Children

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## Goals of the Presentation

To better understand:

- ▶ the impact of early abuse and neglect on a child's development
- ▶ the mechanisms through which child abuse and neglect alter neurodevelopmental and psychosocial processes leading to serious mental health problems

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## Goals of the Presentation

To better understand:

- ▶ common psychiatric diagnoses of maltreated children
- ▶ protective factors that may mitigate the impact of child maltreatment
- ▶ the role of mental health treatment in addressing the mental health needs of abused and neglected children

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### One Woman's Story High Cost of Adverse Childhood Experiences

- ▶ Ultimately led to the ACE study, a landmark in epidemiological research.
- ▶ ACE Research Study - highlights the high cost of adverse childhood experiences on child development.

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### Kaiser Permanente's Obesity Clinic

- ▶ 50% dropout rate of participants that successfully lost weight.
- ▶ 286 drop outs had experienced childhood sexual abuse.

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### ACE Study

#### The ACE study survey:

17,000 middle class people at Kaiser, San Diego were surveyed:

- ▶ 80% were Euro-American
- ▶ 10% were African-American
- ▶ 10% were Hispanic-Latino

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## What is an ACE ?

An ACE - stressful or potentially traumatic childhood experience, such as:

- ▶ Abuse
- ▶ Neglect
- ▶ Witnessing domestic violence
- ▶ Growing up with alcohol or other substance abuse, mental illness, parental discord
- ▶ Crime in the home

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## ACEs: Mental Health/ Medical Problems

- ▶ The more categories of ACEs, the greater the likelihood of experiencing mental health and medical problems
- ▶ As the ACE Score increases, so does the risk for numerous health, mental health and social problems throughout the lifespan

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## ACE Study Results

- ▶ ACE scores – indicate impact on quality of life, including health and mental health
- ▶ Score of two ACEs doubles the risk for developing autoimmune disease as compared to an ACE score of zero

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### 4 ACEs

A person with 4 ACEs is:

- ▶ 2 times more likely to be a smoker
- ▶ 4.5 times more likely to develop depression
- ▶ 7 times more likely to be alcoholic
- ▶ 10 times more likely to have injected street drugs
- ▶ 12 times more likely to have attempted suicide

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### 6 ACEs

The ACE study indicated that persons with 6 or more ACEs died nearly 20 years earlier on average than participants with an ACE score of 0.

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### Child Maltreatment Definition

Behavior toward a child that entails substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm.

- ▶ Includes all forms of child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect

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## Child Maltreatment Types

- ▶ Physical Abuse
- ▶ Emotional Abuse
- ▶ Sexual Abuse
- ▶ Neglect




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## Child Maltreatment Statistics

- ▶ 3.4 million reports of alleged child maltreatment were made to Child Protective Services in the US involving 6.3 million children.
- ▶ Sixty-two percent (2.1 million) of these reports were investigated in detail
- ▶ 686,000 maltreated children were identified.

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## Physical Abuse

- ▶ Refers to physical actions that create a high risk of harm to a child by a caregiver
- ▶ Includes shaking, dropping, striking, biting, and burning
- ▶ The most common cause of serious head injury in infants
- ▶ The most common cause of abdominal injury in toddlers

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## Indicators of Physical Abuse

### Physical Indicators

- ▶ Unexplained burns
- ▶ Unexplained bruises
- ▶ Unexplained fractures, lacerations or abrasions
- ▶ Swollen areas
- ▶ Delayed or inappropriate treatment of injury

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## Indicators of Physical Abuse

### Behavioral Indicators

- ▶ Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably
- ▶ Inappropriate clothing to cover the body
- ▶ Bizarre explanation for injuries
- ▶ Wary of adult contact
- ▶ Self-destructive, aggressive or withdrawn behavior
- ▶ Chronic runaway, does not want to be home

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## Child Neglect

Neglect - failure to provide for or meet a child's basic physical, emotional, educational, and medical needs.

- ▶ Neglect usually occurs without intent to harm.

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## Child Neglect

- ▶ Physical Neglect: Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, and protection from potential harm.
- ▶ Emotional Neglect: Failure to provide affection, love, or other emotional support.

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## Child Neglect

- ▶ Educational Neglect: Failure to enroll a child in school, ensure attendance at school, or provide home schooling.
- ▶ Medical Neglect: Failure to ensure that a child receives appropriate preventive care (e.g., routine dental examinations, treatment for injuries, or treatment for physical or mental disorders).

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## Indicators of Physical Neglect

### Physical Indicators

- |                                  |                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ▶ Abandonment                    | ▶ Poor hygiene                 |
| ▶ Unattended medical needs       | ▶ Lice                         |
| ▶ Consistent lack of supervision | ▶ Distended stomach, emaciated |
| ▶ Consistent hunger              | ▶ Inadequate nutrition         |
| ▶ Inappropriate dress            |                                |




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## Indicators of Physical Neglect

### Behavioral Indicators

- |                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ▶ Fatigue or listlessness         | ▶ Self destructive             |
| ▶ Hungry, begs from classmates    | ▶ School dropout (adolescents) |
| ▶ Reports no caretaker is at home | ▶ Extreme loneliness           |
| ▶ Frequently absent or tardy      |                                |

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## Emotional Abuse

- ▶ Emotional Abuse: Inflicting harm through the use of words or actions. Includes berating, yelling or screaming, belittling, intimidation, terrorizing, and encouraging deviant or criminal behavior.
- ▶ Emotional abuse includes words or actions that are omitted or withheld (e.g., ignoring or rejecting children or isolating them from interaction with other children or adults).

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## Indicators of Emotional Abuse

### Physical Indicators

- |                              |                                    |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ▶ Name-calling               | ▶ Speech disorders                 |
| ▶ Insults, put-downs         | ▶ Delayed physical development     |
| ▶ Terrorization, humiliation | ▶ Substance abuse                  |
| ▶ Isolation, ignoring        | ▶ Ulcers, asthma, severe allergies |
| ▶ Rejection                  | ▶ Corruption                       |

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## Indicators of Emotional Abuse

### Behavioral Indicators

- ▶ Habit disorder (sucking, rocking, biting)
- ▶ Antisocial, destructive
- ▶ Sleep disorders, inhibition of play
- ▶ Passive and aggressive - behavioral extremes
- ▶ Delinquent behavior (especially adolescents)
- ▶ Developmentally delayed

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## Sexual Abuse

- ▶ Any sexual act performed with a child, to a child, or in the presence of a child, for the gratification of an adult or an older, bigger child.
- ▶ Can be physical (unwanted touching, kissing or fondling to sexual penetration).
- ▶ Can be emotionally abusive (forcing child to undress, pornography or exposing a child to adult sexuality).

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## Indicators of Sexual Abuse

### Physical Indicators

- ▶ Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- ▶ Pain, swelling, or itching in genital area
- ▶ Difficulty walking or sitting
- ▶ Bruises or bleeding in genital area
- ▶ Venereal disease
- ▶ Frequent urinary or yeast infections




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## Indicators of Sexual Abuse

### Behavioral Indicators

- ▶ Nightmares, bed wetting
- ▶ Advanced sexual knowledge for their age
- ▶ Excessive masturbation
- ▶ Pornography
- ▶ Fear and avoidance of a particular person or family member
- ▶ Separation anxiety

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## Indicators of Sexual Abuse

### Behavioral Indicators

- ▶ Sexual acting out with other children
- ▶ Problems in school, poor grades
- ▶ Crying spells
- ▶ Regressed behavior, such as bedwetting and/or soiling
- ▶ Sudden change in behavior (aggressive or passive, isolation, withdrawal or anger)

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## Indicators of Abuse on Older Children

- ▶ Older children might resort to destructive behaviors to take away the pain, such as
  - ▶ alcohol or drug abuse
  - ▶ mutilation
  - ▶ suicide attempts
  - ▶ run away




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## The Impact of Child Maltreatment on Child Development

- ▶ **Neurodevelopment** (e.g., brain abnormalities, stress hormone dysregulation)
- ▶ **Psychosocial Development** (impaired attachment, relational difficulties, learning problems, poor social skills, emotional dysregulation, poor impulse control, negative self-esteem and sense of self )

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## Impact of Neuroscience on Understanding Trauma

"We now know from breakthroughs in neurobiology that ACEs disrupt neurodevelopment and can have lasting effects on brain structure and function—the biologic pathways that likely explain the strength of the findings from the ACE Study."

Robert Anda, MD, MS  
The Health and Social Impact of Growing Up With Adverse Childhood Experiences,

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## Impact of Traumatic Stress

When children have a traumatic experience, they react in both physiological and psychological ways.

- ▶ Their heart rate may increase, and they may begin to sweat, become hyperalert, feel agitated, feel faint...
- ▶ And become emotionally upset.

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## What's The Brain Got To Do With It? The Triune Brain



### The Triune Brain

- **Neo-Cortex: Thinking**
  - Cognition, language, speech; integrates information from all three parts of the brain
- **Limbic Area: Emotions**
  - Amygdala - determines emotional significance of sensory input
  - Hippocampus - organizes explicit memory and stores initial fear memory
- **Primitive Brain: Survival**
  - Plays a key role in trauma
  - concerned with survival (Breathing, circulation, digestion, fight, flight freeze)
  - Does not respond to language and conscious thought
  - Responds to sensations and body memory

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## Survival Mode: Flight/Fight/Freeze




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### Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

How exposure to adversity affects the developing brains and bodies of children

#### Physiology of the Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

- ▶ Inability to focus or concentrate
- ▶ Tightness in chest
- ▶ Muscle tension
- ▶ Heart pounding
- ▶ Dizzy or light-headed
- ▶ Trembling or shaking

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### Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

How exposure to adversity affects the developing brains and bodies of children

#### Physiology of the Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

- ▶ Blushing
- ▶ Sweating
- ▶ Dry mouth
- ▶ Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- ▶ Immobility; stunned

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### Traumatic Stress

Trauma occurs when a child experiences an intense event that threatens or causes harm to his or her emotional and physical well-being.

Traumatic stress refers to the physical and emotional responses of a child to events that threaten the life or physical integrity of a child or someone close to the child

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### Types of Traumatic Stress

Acute trauma: a single traumatic incident that is time limited

Chronic trauma: multiple traumatic events over a period of time

Complex Trauma: multiple and ongoing traumatic events of an interpersonal nature and the impact of such an event on a child's development. In children, most cases include exposure to repetitive child maltreatment.

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### Complex Trauma in Maltreated Children

- ▶ A large body of research has shown that PTSD captures only a limited aspect of post-traumatic difficulties in complex trauma.
- ▶ Victims of car accidents and natural disasters often have quite different clinical presentations than those who have suffered interpersonal trauma and/or prolonged traumatic events during childhood
- ▶ While the symptomatology of victims of single-incident traumas are fairly well captured in the DSM-IV diagnosis of PTSD, victims of interpersonal trauma often present with a more complex picture.

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### The Complex Posttraumatic Stress Response:

- ▶ Events occur in childhood prior to full physical, emotional and cognitive development
- ▶ Relational context
- ▶ Multiple and/or repetitive events
- ▶ Extended and/or frequent exposure

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### Impact of Child Maltreatment on Attachment

Since child maltreatment often occurs in the context of the child's relationship with a caregiver, it can interfere with the child's ability to form a secure attachment bond.

Many aspects of a child's healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability.

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### Impact of Child Maltreatment on Attachment

When relationships with caregivers are unstable or unpredictable, children learn that they cannot rely on others to help them.

When primary caregivers exploit, neglect and/or abuse a child, the child may come to believe that he or she is insignificant and/or bad, and that the world can be invalidating and a terrible place.

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### Impact of Secure Attachment on a Child's Development

It is through relationship with at least one important attachment figure that a child learns to:

- ▶ trust others
- ▶ regulate his/her emotions
- ▶ develops a sense of the world as safe or unsafe, and
- ▶ comes to understand her/his own value as a person

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### Emotional/Psychological Consequences of Child Maltreatment

- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Emotional dysregulation
- ▶ Attentional problems
- ▶ Eating disorders
- ▶ Relationship problems
- ▶ Alienation and withdrawal
- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ Inability to trust




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## Behavioral Consequences

- ▶ Problems in school and work
- ▶ Sexual promiscuity or dysfunction
- ▶ Delinquency
- ▶ Teen pregnancy
- ▶ Suicide attempts
- ▶ Criminal or antisocial behavior
  - ▶ Abused and neglected children were found to be 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behavior as a juvenile
- ▶ Substance abuse
- ▶ Aggressive behavior
- ▶ Spousal and child abuse




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## Long-Term Consequences

### Social Problems

- ▶ Family violence
- ▶ Parenting problems
- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Homelessness
- ▶ Criminal behavior

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## Long-Term Consequences

### Mental Health Problems

- ▶ Trauma
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Attentional Problems
- ▶ Suicide
- ▶ Relational Problems

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## Long-Term Consequences

Maltreated children are

- ▶ 3 to 5 times more likely to develop depression
- ▶ 12 times more likely to attempt suicide
- ▶ 6 to 12 times more likely to develop drug and alcohol problems
- ▶ 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behavior as a juvenile

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## Mental Health Problems in Maltreated Children

Common Diagnoses:

- ▶ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- ▶ Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder
- ▶ Reactive Attachment Disorder
- ▶ Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- ▶ Conduct Disorder
- ▶ Bipolar Disorder

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## Best Practices in the Field of Child Abuse Treatment

- ▶ Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- ▶ Parent-Child Interaction Therapy
- ▶ Abuse-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

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## Psychotherapeutic Medication

- ▶ "... there are insufficient data to support the use of SSRI medication alone (i.e., in the absence of psychotherapy) for the treatment of childhood PTSD."
- ▶ The research indicates it is preferable to begin with therapy alone and add medication only if the child's symptom severity or lack of response suggests a need for additional interventions.

Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Guidelines - PTSD

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## Protective Factors

- ▶ Protective Factors for Child Maltreatment buffer children from being abused or neglected.
- ▶ There is scientific evidence to support the following family protective factor:
  - ▶ Supportive Family Environment and Social Networks

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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## Additional Protective Factors

- ▶ Nurturing parenting skills
- ▶ Stable family relationships
- ▶ Household rules and child monitoring
- ▶ Parental employment
- ▶ Adequate housing
- ▶ Access to health care and social services
- ▶ Caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors

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## Things you can do

- ▶ Speak to your supervisor and follow agency protocols
- ▶ Promote a safe atmosphere
- ▶ Provide support
- ▶ Listen when child wants to talk
- ▶ Keep things as predictable as possible

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## Cost of Childhood Maltreatment

### The Human and Economic Costs of Child Maltreatment

- ▶ The ACE score is directly related to a host of mental health and medical problems making it a public health issue.
- ▶ The total lifetime cost of child maltreatment is \$124 billion each year

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## Thank You

Thank you for your energy, time and commitment in helping children whose lives have been affected by adverse experiences. Thank you for being part of the solution!




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